Christian Community

A Program Service of the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches, 289 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N. Y. and the Commission on Christian Social Action of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 2969 West 25th St., Cleveland 13, Ohio

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Church-Time Nursery at Warren Avenue Church

A City Church with a Community Program

By Julian J. Keiser

Takes Action on Housing

During the campaign over a year ago to get non-discriminatory public housing in Chicago, especially on vacant land sites to prevent its adding to the housing shortage (since good public housing in slum areas usually displaces more families than it provides for with new building), Warren Avenue Congregational Church conducted a systematic campaign within the congregation and in the community. A housing film strip put out by the Chicago Congregational Union, housing speakers, and literature got into the program of every organization at least once. A community meeting was held in the church. Finally a church meeting was called to discuss and vote on the matter.

The congregation went on record as favoring the seven housing sites then before the City Council and sent a representative from the Social Action Committee of the church to appear at the public meeting before the City Council. We also organized a mail-letters campaign to local aldermen in the wards in which the parish is located and sent delegations from the church to visit and speak with two of them.

Race prejudice finally killed the measure (along with the help of the powerful Real Estate lobby), but our people showed concern for this issue and acted as Christians. Adrian Robson, housing expert on the Chicago Congregational Union staff said if twenty churches in the city had done as we did, the aldermen might have voted differently.

Helps Voters

During every election, (city, state, and national), in the past few years

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Social Action Comes Home to Salem

By Robert D. Brodt

In November of 1950 Salem Evangelical and Reformed church and the entire community of Allentown, Pa., was shocked by the death of three innocent children from gas fumes which seeped into their home while they were asleep. Investigation showed that the gas had escaped from a faulty pipe feed line in the street and had found its way into the Amey home through a crevice in the ground.

The neighbors alleged that they had noticed a gas odor in the vicinity on previous occasions, and early in the morning of the day when this tragedy occurred, the people who lived next door to the Ameys had called for a service man from the Allentown-Bethlehem Gas Company to investigate gas fumes. This man claimed there were no illuminating gas fumes in the home.

It was a little later in the morning that these same neighbors noticed how quiet it was next door at the Amey home and they became suspicious. Police and firemen were called, and they were just beating down the door when Mr. Amey, a night employee of the Bethlehem Steel Company, returned home.

All three children — Nancy, 7, Sandra, 9, and Larry, 11, died in less than twenty-four hours amid scenes of frantic attempts to revive them in the Sacred Heart Hospital. Fortunately the mother survived.

Never was a community more united in a common sorrow than when this tragedy occurred. Many offers of help and financial assistance came from people who did not know the Amey family. People poured out their sym-

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Social Action Comes Home to Salem

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pathy unreservedly. In that hour the bonds of brotherhood and love, the realities of our oneness in the social group, became more than lofty abstractions.

The Allentown-Bethlehem Gas Co. at first developed a "no-comment" attitude. The faulty pipe was exposed, patched and covered up. When the newspapers pressed the Gas Company for information regarding their methods of testing for the presence of gas, they were told the "nose" is still the only reliable method. In the ensuing weeks the newspapers continued to follow the story. They intimated there was scientific apparatus for the detection of gas now being used at the Bethlehem Steel Company. They reported every gas leak which came to their attention.

At the same time the Builders' Bible Class of Salem Church held a meeting to decide what they should do for the Ameys who were members of their group. They called the minister in for consultation. In brief I told them, "The best thing you can do is to prevent this thing from happening again." A discussion followed in which some spoke about how fearful many people living in the older sections of the city were about the danger of escaping gas. They wanted more information and assurance.

Out of this meeting there emerged a plan. The Builders' Class would draw up and circulate petitions calling upon the City Council to make a thorough investigation and then report publicly their findings relative to the condition of the gas mains in the sections of the city where leaks had been most prevalent. In turn, I would present a letter to the Consistory for approval, addressed to the mayor and requesting him to take action to protect the health and safety of citizens.

The Consistory passed a motion approving the letter unanimously, even though some members were hesitant to take such forthright action. It is doubtful that they would have done so had the case not involved members of our church. A number of members who were employed by utility companies were apprehensive about their position as consistory men as contrasted with their position as employes of public utilities. It was out of such searching of the heart that our final action was taken.

Our letter was approved on Wednesday night and placed in the mail. On Friday I received a letter inviting members of the consistory and myself to attend a special meeting of the City Council called for the following Monday. One deacon and two members of the Builders' Class attended the hearing with me.

What were the results of the hearing? For one thing, it brought some facts to light:

1. The gas lines in the older section of the city are 75 years old. (The City Engineer claimed cast iron pipe often lasts more than a century.)
2. The city has a law requiring inspection of gas lines, but such inspection is impracticable because it would involve tearing up streets.
3. The defective pipe at the Amey home was merely patched.
4. The State Public Utilities Commission would report on its findings.
5. It might be possible to draft some legislation requiring stricter control. The City Solicitor was directed to investigate this possibility.

The hearing also helped to organize public opinion. When further leaks were discovered on Fountain Street (where the Ameys lived) a representative of the Gas Co. was quoted in the papers as saying, "Why do they make mountains out of molehills?" That statement made Mr. Amey resolve that he would sue the Company for liability. It also resulted in the Gas Company finally tearing up the pipe and replacing it in Fountain Street.

At the following Consistory meeting one of our Consistory men who had been a bit fearful about tackling a controversial issue expressed pride in the fact that the leadership of our church had grown in the esteem of the community because of the action taken. What impressed all of us, however, was that we had here a first-hand demonstration of the tremendous power and influence for good the church — only one church — may have when it chooses to accept a social responsibility.

Groups at Work

Bay City, Michigan — Last year our newly-reactivated social action committee undertook an investigation of racial integration in our community. The results, when published, drew criticism from several individuals in our church. From the nature of the criticisms, it appeared that these people did not happen to know about our work, and were taken a little by surprise.

This year we decided to ask the chairman of each active group within our church to give us a liaison member, who would work with us and at the same time keep other groups — men's and women's clubs, discussion clubs, et cetera — periodically informed as to what we were doing and what problems, if any, we were encountering.

Not only has this move been highly successful in integrating the social action committee more closely with other active church groups, but it has helped to bring us a number of active committee members, who by and large have been very productive both in discussions and in our project work. Our committee has more than doubled its 1951 membership. We have eight men and ten women, ranging in age from 15 to 78; over three-quarters are married and over half are parents. Vocations include student, housewife, teacher, factory worker, government inspector, school principal, businessman, copy writer, research chemist, decorator and retired.

I feel that the greatest factor in our growth, both within ourselves and in relationship to our church and our community, was this simple step of asking the other groups in our church to assign liaison people to our committee. We are beginning to find out that the untapped talent and strength within our church was much greater than most of us thought.

William G. Lloyd

Beverly, Mass. — A significant achievement of the Social Action Committee of the Beverly Council of Churches recently was to investigate reports that marijuana was being sold to high school students. After consultation with the mayor, police traced the sale to a young man in another city who was growing the weed in a neighbor's yard.

The social action committee in the Congregational Church, according to Mrs. Albert Shepherdson, has undertaken a number of projects — a cake sale to help the Massachusetts Conference Displaced Persons program, the

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International Relations Letter

May 22, 1952

For the light it may help to shed on two viewpoints concerning the function of the Church in international affairs some correspondence between a thoughtful layman and the C.S.A. International Relations secretary takes the place of the usual comment in this month's "Letter." The layman's name is withheld because there was no time to ask his permission to publish his letter.

A Layman's Comment

April 15, 1952

Dear Friends:

"I would like to convey to you my reaction to certain parts of the discussion of national sovereignty and the world community, in the last issue of *Social Action* ("The Christian Faith and World Upheaval," March, 1952. Ed.) On the whole it seems to be a well thought out presentation and with most of it I am in full accord but there is an important part of it which I cannot accept, and to which I must register some protest. It is the section in which, in developing the concept of collective security, you sanction U. S. air bases around the world, far-flung military alliances, and strong-armed methods, if necessary, for securing and protecting access to strategic materials needed for 'defense.'

"This is understandable, if not supportable, as a policy of the State Department or the Department of Defense but not understandable as the policy of the Christian church. Does this sanction of bases all over the world extend to everyone, including the Russians? May they instigate and finance military preparations against us on every continent with the same acceptance you grant such actions on our part, or is it wrong for both to do this?

"Is the protection, by whatever means, of access to critical military raw materials in foreign lands a legitimate policy from a moral standpoint, or only from a selfish, nationalistic, imperialistic viewpoint? If the latter, how can the church condone it? How can the church support the power struggle at all? Does it not thereby repudiate the Golden Rule, and place its faith in physical power over moral persuasion?

"Are you not ready yet to renounce the war system, and build from a foundation or nucleus of brotherly love, however long it takes and whatever the consequences? If there ever was a time when war was the lesser evil to the apparent alternatives, surely that time is long since past.

"Man, in his weakness, may resort to the evil of war as long as there is a 'universal prevalence of sinful impulses,' but this does not mean we should not direct our efforts, even if futilely, against it, and scorn a leadership based on violence, knowing, as you point out, that such leadership cannot be trusted in any nation, including our own. We are not likely to refrain from evil-doing if we are willing to forge the tools.

"There is little justification for social or political action within the church, in the name of Christianity, unless it sticks to the idealism of the founder. It is our job to make reality out of the ideal, not to conform the ideal to reality.

"With best wishes to you, nevertheless, and appreciation for the sincerity with which I believe you are trying to find the right solution!"

Mr. Reissig's Reply

April 24, 1952

Dear Mr.——:

"We very much appreciate your comment on the most recent issue of *Social Action*. Since the issue was written mainly by me, your letter has been placed on my desk.

"Let me, in the first place, make clear that the Council for Social Action is never to be held responsible for specific statements made in the magazine. It may or may not agree but, within our general objectives, a good deal of freedom is given the writers, even when, as in this case, the writer is a staff member. The C.S.A. has never adopted as policy the specific statements in the article to which you object, and I do not know whether or not it would endorse them.

"Your letter poses a difficult question. I should say that the C.S.A.—and certainly this writer!—is convinced that there is always a state of ethical and moral tension between the Christian Gospel and actual foreign policy. And it should be one of the functions of Christians to see that this tension is maintained. On the other hand, our testimony is of little value unless we take account of what nations actually do or will do. We have to deal with ultimate ideals and with actualities at the same time. One of the actualities in the present international situation is that every nation is going to do what it thinks necessary to insure its survival. We may and do have differences of opinion on what is necessary. From an ultimate ethical viewpoint, we may even ask if the survival of a nation can be taken as an absolute objective. But one thing seems certain: every nation is going to take its survival as a first objective. Taking that into account, there is still plenty of room for Christian criticism and pressure.

"I am personally as unhappy as you are about our far-flung bases, the rearming of Japan, etc. But, as I point out on page 17 of the article, it seems wiser to direct our efforts against the present nationalistic system rather than demand that our nation, or any nation, refrain from taking the steps which seem necessary to its survival. It is my belief that we shall not move closer to the idealism of Christ mainly by a negative ethical attack on present practices but, more effectively, by building the international institutions and habits which will help to make it unnecessary for the nations to act as they now act.

"This is an all too brief and inadequate explanation. I make it, not in any attempt to justify completely the statements to which you object, for the statements are more in the nature of things to be considered than of facts held to be finally and completely true. We are all groping for light. I should certainly hope that the article, as a whole, proves that there is no disposition on our part to acquiesce in things as they are. If past experience is a key, we shall certainly be getting letters criticising this issue on the grounds that it is too idealistic.

Sincerely yours,
Herman F. Reissig

A City Church with a Community Program

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our social action committee has mimeographed voting information for the people of our congregation. They have used freely the publications of the League of Women Voters and the Council of Church Women in Greater Chicago in getting the voting record of candidates and in listing the answers they gave to pertinent questions of interest to Christians. They have not told people how to vote, but have armed them with impartial information giving facts on qualifications, voting records, and points of view on important current issues.

Acts in School Situation

Three years ago some of the women in one of our circles indicated there was open discrimination against Negroes, barring them from attendance in a public school in the district in which they lived. The Circle voted to study the matter. They interviewed mothers who tried to enroll their children. They gathered considerable evidence, after many attempts finally gained an audience with the school principal, and took their findings to the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, which sent them to the Superintendent of Schools. A few months later Negroes were admitted to the school on the same basis as others in the district.

No Racial Bars

Several years ago, after a number of Negroes had attended our worship services for six months or more and several had indicated their desire to unite, the Church Council discussed the matter of admitting Negroes to church membership. After several long sessions, upon recommendation of the Board of Deacons, the Council voted without a single dissenting voice to admit to the church any person "on the basis of affirmation of faith without regard to race or any external matter."

Other Concerns

On several occasions the Social Action Committee has brought matters of general concern before the church congregation—usually following the morning worship. In this way action was voted and letters sent from the church and from individuals to our State Representatives, to our Governor, and to our Congressmen:

(1) favoring a State Fair Employment Practices Commission with power of enforcement,
(2) favoring wheat for India,
(3) opposing the Larson Bills before the state legislature intended to cripple housing in the city of Chicago,
(4) opposing the Broyles-McClintock anti-subversive bills which were primarily designed to prevent free thought and free speech.

Institute at Fisk

In listing summer schools and institutes last month, we should have included the Ninth Annual Institute of Race Relations, June 30 to July 12, at Fisk University. Cost, $80 for room, board, and tuition. For information write Robert C. Sweet, American Missionary Association, Fisk University, Nashville 8, Tennessee.

Groups at Work

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collecting of clothes for Korea, entertainment of thirty-five blind people, and the removal of a girl from an undesirable home situation into a suitable Christian home.

We find that here and there pastors and social action committees are quoting news and comment from *Christian Community* in their parish papers and weekly bulletins. We are happy to recommend this practice, with or without credit!

First Aid For Voters

Readers of Christian Community will be receiving with this issue the leaflet, What Can Christians Do In 1952? This is an effort on the part of a dozen cooperating Protestant social action agencies to set forth the basic alternatives confronting Christian citizens during this critical campaign year. It should find its way into the hand and into the home of every member of every congregation. It will do so if every reader who receives a free sample will order enough for every family and friend at the special rate of $4 per hundred, $30 per thousand. (Single copies, 10c).

The Voting Record of the 82nd Congress provides objective information as to the performance of your Congressmen on a number of key issues. Many churches have one copy posted conspicuously and keep other copies circulating in their organizations. Single copies, 10 cents.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Additional copies may be obtained for 2 cents each. Requests from Congregational Christians should be addressed to Ray Gibbons, Director, Council for Social Action, 289 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, New York. Requests by Evangelical and Reformed, and others, as well as news items and communications, should be addressed to the Editor, Huber F. Klemme, Commission on Christian Social Action, 2969 West 25th Street, Cleveland 13, Ohio.

Sound Without Fury

Christian Community takes pleasure in calling attention to two radio programs which are exceptions to the cult of the "superficial, the temporary, and the sensational" to which the Commission on the Freedom of the Press found most American communications media devoted.

The People Act, presented Sunday nights over CBS by the TV-Radio Workshop established by the Ford Foundation, announces that its entire series, beginning with the original broadcast on January 6, 1952, is now available on 33-1/3 rpm long-playing records, at $1.85 per record or $24.05 for the 26-week series. Orders or requests for information should be directed to The People Act Center, State College, Pennsylvania. After September 1 transcriptions will also be available for free loan distribution through the Federal Radio Education Committee, U. S. Office of Education, Washington 25, D. C.

Religion at the News Desk, broadcast each Saturday night at seven o'clock over WELI in New Haven, Connecticut, and rebroadcast later in about a dozen stations throughout the country, is a Protestant intepretation of major news developments. Believing, as Ernest Lefever puts it, that "religion is not one of twenty-one departments in *Time* magazine but an interpretation of life in all its richness and complexity," a committee of students from the Yale Divinity School and the Yale Graduate School bring the best available information and theological insight to bear on *all* major current events.

Subscriptions to the script for personal study, group discussion, or rebroadcasting, may be secured for $4.50 per year from Religion at the News Desk, 409 Prospect St., New Haven 11, Conn.